

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION
PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT**

Project Title: Discretionary Well Permitting and Management Program
Project Location: Stanislaus County

Project Description

Stanislaus County is implementing a Discretionary Well Permitting and Management Program pursuant to its Groundwater Ordinance (Chapter 9.37 of the Stanislaus County Code), adopted in November 2014 to promote sustainable groundwater management. This program applies to the unincorporated portions of the County and issues discretionary permits for new wells after the County makes a determination that operation of these wells would comply with the Groundwater Ordinance's prohibition against unsustainable groundwater extraction. The County makes this determination based on review of substantial evidence required to be provided by the applicant, and can apply permit conditions to help assure that groundwater will be extracted sustainably from the well, and to support its groundwater management goals under the Groundwater Ordinance.

The Groundwater Ordinance specifies several exemptions from discretionary well permitting. These include: (1) wells for public water agencies and their rate payers where the agency is in compliance with an existing Groundwater Management Plan or Groundwater Sustainability Plan (because they are presumed to be managing groundwater sustainably); (2) "*de minimis*" wells that will be used to extract less than 2 acre-feet of water per year; and (3) in-kind replacement wells that represent no increase in groundwater extraction. For these exempt wells, ministerial permits are issued as they were prior to adoption of the Groundwater Ordinance.

As an additional requirement of the Groundwater Ordinance, after Groundwater Sustainability Plans are adopted for the groundwater basins underlying the County pursuant to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the prohibition against unsustainable extraction will apply to any existing or proposed well in the unincorporated areas of the County from which the County reasonably concludes groundwater extraction is unsustainable. When such a determination is made, the affected party will be notified and required to demonstrate, based on substantial evidence, that extraction of groundwater from the well will not violate the prohibition.

The project that will be evaluated in the Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) consists of continued discretionary well permitting and regulation activities that will be implemented under the Groundwater Ordinance after the PEIR is adopted. The purpose of the PEIR is to streamline the environmental review process for individual discretionary decisions, to help refine the well permitting and management program through the development of mitigation measures, if needed, and to provide a more robust environmental basis for implementation of the program.

Agency Review and Comments

In compliance with the State Guidelines for implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this Notice of Preparation is hereby sent to inform you that Stanislaus

County is preparing a PEIR for the discretionary well permitting and management program. The PEIR will provide program-level analysis of the program across its implementation period through 2042, at which time all groundwater subbasins in Stanislaus County are required to be operated sustainably under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

As Lead Agency, Stanislaus County needs to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project (anticipated areas of analysis are identified in the attached Initial Study). Please designate a contact person in your agency and send your response to the address below.

Environmental Review Process

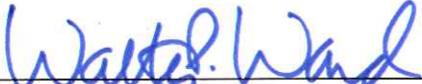
Stanislaus County will be the Lead Agency and will prepare a PEIR to evaluate and disclose the potential environmental effects of continuing to implement the discretionary well permitting and management program under the Groundwater Ordinance.

An Initial Study was prepared to identify the environmental issues that will be addressed in the PEIR. The Initial Study includes the project description and project location, and identifies potential environmental effects. The Initial Study is attached to this Notice of Preparation. Copies of the Initial Study are available for review at the Stanislaus County Department of Environmental Resources, 3800 Cornucopia Way, Suite C, Modesto, CA 95358. In addition, the Initial Study may be downloaded from the County's groundwater resources web page at the following internet address: <http://www.stancounty.com/er/groundwater/>.

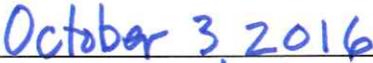
Due to time limits mandated by State law, your response should be sent at the earliest possible date, and no later than 30 days from transmittal of this notice. This Notice of Preparation initiates a 30-day comment period that extends from October 4, 2016 to November 3, 2016. Comments must be received before 5:00 PM on November 3, 2016, to be considered in the preparation of the PEIR. They may be e-mailed to wward@envres.org or mailed to:

Walter Ward
Water Resources Manager
Stanislaus County Department of Environmental Resources
3800 Cornucopia Way, Suite C
Modesto, CA 95358

Two public scoping meetings will be held for the PEIR: (1) Stanislaus County Technical Advisory Committee meeting at 1:30 to 3:00 PM on October 6 at the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau, 1201 L Street, Modesto; and (2) from 7:00 to 9:00 PM on October 13 at Harvest Hall, 3800 Cornucopia Way #B, Modesto. Persons wishing to comment on the scope of the PEIR at these meetings will be given the opportunity to fill out comment cards and/or to speak publically.



Walter Ward
Water Resources Manager
(209) 525-6710



Date